



**Spoken**  
**3/25/13**

**DENISE MERRILL**

SECRETARY OF THE STATE  
CONNECTICUT

**Government Administration and Elections**  
**Committee Public Hearing**  
**March 25, 2013**  
**Testimony**

Good Morning Chairman Jutila, Chairman Musto, ranking members and committee members. For the record, my name is Denise Merrill and I am Secretary of the State of Connecticut. I am pleased to testify on the following bills relating to the conduct of elections in Connecticut.

**Senate Bill 4 "AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY VOTING."** This bill would enact early voting for the state of Connecticut for state elections – on the even numbered years. It would require municipalities to have polling locations open for voters to cast ballots for a period of eight days leading up to Election Day in November.

I strongly support early voting in the state of Connecticut. I have previously testified in front of this committee numerous times in support of a constitutional amendment that would open the doors to early voting, as well as a pilot program to institute early voting for municipal elections this November. I have been one of the strongest advocates of early voting in our state consistently for the last few years because we simply need to modernize our election practices to accommodate the busy, hectic lives of our voters. Many potential voters, who are very civic-minded people, just don't have the time to take off from work and get to their polling place to cast a ballot. Or better yet, if they have already made up their mind who they will be voting for prior to the election, why wait until the first Tuesday in November to cast that ballot?

Allowing early voting in our state could also alleviate some of the long lines we have seen at polling places – particularly in high-turnout Presidential elections. More than 30 other states have enacted early voting – in person, by mail, through no excuse absentee ballots or some combination of these methods – with great success. Voters love the convenience of casting that ballot early and it is very popular across red and blue states. Combined with our enactment of Election Day Registration I actually see the potential

for these reforms to substantially increase voter turnout in Connecticut – which is a good thing. If you make voting easier and more convenient, more eligible voters will choose to cast ballots. And that is what we want.

I believe that the public has an appetite for early voting and other innovations and flexibility that Connecticut's election system currently does not offer. In the past presidential election of 2012, more than 32 million Americans cast their ballots early, before election day. They voted on weekends, after religious services, whenever it was convenient for them. Our policy makers want feedback from the public, and elections are one of the most tangible ways that someone can make their views known. And, if we want people to participate we need to meet them where they are, and to them, voting on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November is simply a tradition and one many would be open to changing. In fact, I dare say that many voters find it to be an inconvenient time.

Of course, early voting won't solve all the problems associated with low voter turnout. Turnout is also driven by the quality of the candidates and the level of discourse, and the issues facing our community. But to the extent election administration can enhance turnout, relieve pressure on Election Day and give voters' more opportunity, early voting is a good option.

Over the last few election cycles we have seen some pretty intense and negative races. A lot of this mudslinging happens at the very end of a campaign --- just when some people are starting to pay attention. I think this does our voters a great disservice. And since most candidates will want their last message to a voter to be positive I think that the implementation of early voting will curb some of that last minute negative campaigning. That's something that I think we'd all like to see.

**Senate Bill 1146 “AN ACT CONCERNING CROSS- ENDORSEMENTS.”** This bill would eliminate the cross-endorsement of candidates for office by multiple political parties on the ballot. Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that allow for major party candidates to be cross endorsed by minor parties. I believe that a vibrant democracy means encouraging avenues for everyone to express their opinion, and, to me, that is what minor parties offer to voters.

But I think the larger question here is: what does it really mean to be a political party? Connecticut has a rich tradition of independent-minded people who have forged their own way and even formed their own parties. There was Governor Weicker's A Connecticut Party and the Connecticut for Lieberman Party. And, most of us are familiar with the Working Families Party, the Independent Party, the Green and Libertarian Parties. Maybe you even remember the Concerned Citizen Party and the Natural Law Party. But did you know that Connecticut also has the Canterbury First Party, Chatham Party, Reform Party, Swing Party, Bottom Line Party, and the Guilty Party? And many more. I would not want to curtail someone's ability to organize their own party and participate in our elections. To me, the more unique voices we have, the better.

But, I do think that permitting cross-endorsement has created some voter confusion, and I'd like to speak to that today. Only five states – New York, Delaware, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Connecticut have ballots organized by a party line. In the whole country, only New York and Connecticut have ballots organized on a grid with the party laid out horizontally. The other three Delaware, New Hampshire, and South Carolina have a party line that runs vertically. The other 45 states vote by office with no horizontal or vertical line. The party-line horizontal grid in which our ballot is laid out can make cross endorsements confusing to many voters. They see their candidate on the major party's line, and then again on the minor party's line. As a result, many voters vote for their candidate for a certain office twice – filling in the bubble next to their candidate on BOTH THE MAJOR AND MINOR PARTY'S LINE.

We have programmed our optical scan voting machines to accept that ballot because WHO the voter wants is clear, but moderators are then required to go through an intermediate step of allocating these votes among the cross-endorsing parties. This kind of voter confusion doesn't happen in other states because the ballot is not designed to have a party line. Instead, there is a listing of candidates for office and next to the candidates' name is the endorsing party (or parties, as the case may be). A copy of a ballot from Vermont is attached to my testimony. Of course, once you redesign the ballot by office rather than party you then need to consider the process by which minor parties gain access to the ballot.

Currently, minor parties in Connecticut gain ballot access through either a petitioning process or based on the performance of minor party candidates in the previous election cycle. And timeliness is also a factor. If you gain access via performance in a prior election you keep that ballot access by running another candidate and again meeting that threshold of performance. Performance of minor parties wouldn't be something we could measure if we designed our ballot by office instead of party. So we would have to figure out an alternative method. Many other states only require a fee to be paid to get a ballot line. Or, perhaps, it should be tied to some sort of number of people registered in your party.

These complicated issues are, I'm sure, the reason that 43 states don't allow for cross endorsements at all. Most Connecticut voters are registered as Unaffiliated. This could be an indicator that they are open to new parties and new ideas. We should consider now how to accommodate a growing number of minor parties in such a way that we have minimal voter confusion. For all of these reasons, I think that this should be studied closely by the legislature.

**HB 6670 "AN ACT CONCERNING SUPERVISED ABSENTEE BALLOTING, APPLICATIONS FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS AND DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ASSIGNED TO MODERATORS."** I just want to briefly point out Section three of this bill, which I support.

Section three of this bill streamlines the absentee ballot application process for taking out multiple applications at one time. Currently each *application* is assigned a unique serial number by each town clerk. This proposal eliminates that and, instead, assigns a

unique serial number to *each person circulating* absentee ballot applications. That is the data point worth tracking as it relates to any need to investigate allegations of absentee ballot fraud. This is language gives relief to Town Clerks all over Connecticut who administer absentee ballots and is also supported by my office and the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

Thank you and at this point I will be happy to take any questions.

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Vergennes  
Addison 3

OFFICIAL VERMONT GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT  
NOVEMBER 6, 2012

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS

- Use BLACK PEN or PENCIL to fill in the oval.
- To vote for a person whose name is printed on the ballot, fill in the oval ☐ to the right of the name of that person.
- To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write or stick his or her name in the blank space provided and fill in the oval ☐ to the right of the write-in line.
- Do not vote for more candidates than the "VOTE for NOT MORE THAN #" for an office.
- If you make a mistake, tear, or deface the ballot, return it to an election official and obtain another ballot. DO NOT ERASE.

| FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES<br>Vote for not more than ONE   | FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR<br>Vote for not more than ONE   | FOR STATE SENATOR<br>Vote for not more than TWO  |
|---|---|--|
| ROSS "ROCKY" C. ANDERSON, Utah <input type="radio"/><br>and LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ, California <input type="radio"/><br>Justice  | CASSANDRA "CASS" GEKAS <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Progressive/Democratic<br>BEN MITCHELL <input type="radio"/><br>Westminster Liberty Union<br>PHIL SCOTT <input type="radio"/><br>Berlin Republican<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>   | CLAIRE AYER <input type="radio"/><br>Addison Democratic<br>CHRISTOPHER A. BRAY <input type="radio"/><br>New Haven Democratic<br>ROBERT WAGNER <input type="radio"/><br>Ripton Independent<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>        |
| GARY JOHNSON, New Mexico <input type="radio"/><br>and JAMES P. GRAY, California <input type="radio"/><br>Libertarian  | FOR STATE TREASURER<br>Vote for not more than ONE   | FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE<br>Vote for not more than TWO   |
| PETA LINDSAY, California <input type="radio"/><br>and YARI OSORIO, New York <input type="radio"/><br>Socialism and Liberation   | JESSICA "JESSY" DIAMONDSTONE <input type="radio"/><br>Dummerston Liberty Union<br>BETH PEARCE <input type="radio"/><br>Barre City Democratic/Working Families<br>DON SCHRAMM <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Progressive<br>WENDY WILTON <input type="radio"/><br>Rutland City Republican<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/> | GREGORY CLARK <input type="radio"/><br>Vergennes Republican<br>ARABELLA HOLZAPFEL <input type="radio"/><br>Ferrisburgh Democratic<br>DIANE LANPHER <input type="radio"/><br>Vergennes Democratic<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/> |
| MITT ROMNEY, Massachusetts <input type="radio"/><br>and PAUL RYAN, Wisconsin <input type="radio"/><br>Republican<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>  | FOR SECRETARY OF STATE<br>Vote for not more than ONE  | FOR HIGH BAILIFF<br>Vote for not more than ONE   |
| FOR US SENATOR<br>Vote for not more than ONE  | JAMES C. CONDOS <input type="radio"/><br>Montpelier Dem/Prog/WF/Rep<br>MARY ALICE "MAL" HERBERT <input type="radio"/><br>Putney Liberty Union<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>   | CHARLES S. CLARK JR <input type="radio"/><br>Middlebury Republican<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>   |
| PETE DIAMONDSTONE <input type="radio"/><br>Brattleboro Liberty Union<br>CRIS ERICSON <input type="radio"/><br>Chester United States Marijuana<br>LAUREL LAFRAMBOISE <input type="radio"/><br>Chelsea VoteKISS<br>JOHN MACGOVERN <input type="radio"/><br>Windsor Republican<br>PETER MOSS <input type="radio"/><br>Fairfax Peace and Prosperity<br>BERNIE SANDERS <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Independent<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/> | FOR AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS<br>Vote for not more than ONE   |  |
| FOR REPRESENTATIVE TO CONGRESS<br>Vote for not more than ONE  | DOUG HOFFER <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Democratic/Progressive<br>VINCENT ILUZZI <input type="radio"/><br>Derby Republican/Working Families<br>JERRY LEVY <input type="radio"/><br>Brattleboro Liberty Union<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>  |  |
| JAMES "SAM" DESROCHERS <input type="radio"/><br>Milton Independent<br>MARK DONKA <input type="radio"/><br>Hartford Republican<br>ANDRE LAFRAMBOISE <input type="radio"/><br>Chelsea VoteKISS<br>JANE NEWTON <input type="radio"/><br>Londonderry Liberty Union<br>PETER WELCH <input type="radio"/><br>Norwich Democratic/Working Families<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>  | FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL<br>Vote for not more than ONE  |  |
| FOR GOVERNOR<br>Vote for not more than ONE  | ROSEMARIE JACKOWSKI <input type="radio"/><br>Bennington Liberty Union<br>JACK McMULLEN <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Republican<br>WILLIAM H. SORRELL <input type="radio"/><br>Burlington Democratic<br>ED STANAK <input type="radio"/><br>Barre City Progressive<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>                       |  |
| RANDY BROCK <input type="radio"/><br>Swanton Republican<br>DAVE EAGLE <input type="radio"/><br>Brattleboro Liberty Union<br>CRIS ERICSON <input type="radio"/><br>Chester United States Marijuana<br>EMILY PEYTON <input type="radio"/><br>Putney Independent<br>PETER SHUMLIN <input type="radio"/><br>Putney Democratic/Working Families<br>(Write-in) <input type="radio"/>  |   |  |

TURN BALLOT OVER  
AND CONTINUE VOTING

FOR JUSTICE OF  
THE PEACE

Vote for not more than TEN

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| BARRY ALDINGER        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Democratic            |                       |
| GREG CLARK            | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| CLARA COMEAU          | <input type="radio"/> |
| Democratic            |                       |
| CHRISTOPHER COUSINEAU | <input type="radio"/> |
| Democratic            |                       |
| PATRICIA GANSON       | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| ANNE HUMPHREY         | <input type="radio"/> |
| Democratic            |                       |
| MARK KOENIG           | <input type="radio"/> |
| Democratic            |                       |
| THELMA "KITTY" OXHOLM | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| LYNNIA POPE-RIER      | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| RENA TREPANIER        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| ROBERT "BOB" WORLEY   | <input type="radio"/> |
| Republican            |                       |
| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |
| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |
| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |
| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |
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| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |
| (Write-in)            | <input type="radio"/> |

YOU HAVE NOW  
COMPLETED VOTING